

72-95-  
D745-

# DRAMA

APR 1 1932

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE  
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY  
AT HOME & ABROAD



## CONTENTS

APRIL MCMXXXII

RECENT PLAYS : BY J. T. GREIN  
/ THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF A  
ROMANTIC REVIVAL IN  
DRAMA : BY MALCOLM  
MUGGERIDGE / RADIO  
DRAMA AND ITS CRITICS :  
BY CYRIL WOOD / SOME  
PRACTICAL NOTES ON PLAY  
PRODUCTION : BY A. K.  
BOYD / RECENT BOOKS  
/ ILLUSTRATIONS /

6d.

*Published by*  
THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE  
8 ADELPHI TERRACE  
LONDON  
W.C.

Sale  
or  
Hire  
as  
desired



AS SUPPLIED TO LEADING  
LONDON AND PROVINCIAL  
THEATRES AND AMATEUR  
DRAMATIC SOCIETIES

## STRAND ELECTRIC & ENGINEERING COY. LTD.

S.E.E.C.O.L. (Trade Mark), Telegrams:  
Telephone: 24 Floral St., Covent Garden, Spotlite, Rand,  
Templebar 7464 (3 lines) LONDON, W.C.2 London

## People's National Theatre.

AT THE  
DUCHESS THEATRE  
DRURY LANE

Hon. Director: NANCY PRICE

## THE ROSE WITHOUT A THORN

By CLIFFORD BAX

"It is perfect"—JAMES AGATE.

"One of the loveliest pieces of work I have seen for a long time. This is a play everyone should see no matter at what sacrifice of time or money."—

J. K. PROTHERO.

Evenings at 8.30

Matinees:

Mondays, Wednesdays & Saturdays, at 2.0

MEMBERSHIP TICKETS 5/9, Students 3/-  
(Including Tax)

BOOK NOW—Every seat half-price to Members.

JOIN NOW—And be a pioneer in a movement that has a great future.

Debate: Sunday, April 10th. at 3.

Admission Free.

## MISS WEBBER'S Typewriting Office

PLAYS, PARTS, AUTHORS' MSS., Etc.  
VISITING SECRETARIES.  
DUPLICATING.

6 Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, London, S.W.1  
(Telephone: Whitehall 8324)

## THE VILLAGE DRAMA COSTUME CUPBOARD

(in association with the British Drama League.)

Good Historical Costumes on hire at very low rates to players in Town and Country.  
Special terms to members of the British Drama League.

Apply:

### COSTUME DEPARTMENT

274, New Cross Road, S.E.14 Tel. No.: New Cross 4369

## The Clothes Peg.



## A Boon to the Modern Woman

Why not call and inspect Model Gowns, etc., as good as new in pleasant surroundings—at a quarter of the original prices.

Exclusive clothes in good condition always accepted and disposed of to the best advantage.

Write or Call

THE CLOTHES PEG,

51, Beak Street, Regent Street, W.1.

'Phone: Gerrard 3886

.

N

a  
o  
o.

.  
at

e  
n

ect  
od  
d-  
he

od  
ed

J

vo

=

=

T

on

pr

dr

ha

Ap

dr

wo

sec

are

th

lif

tin

in

of

be

en

M

vi

sh

M

an

ph

co

wi

Fr

M

"T

Co

co

ini

w

Je

me

# DRAMA

VOL. 10

APRIL MCMXXXII

NUMBER 7

---

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

---

## PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By J. T. Grein

THE month has been more remarkable for the number of plays withdrawn after only a few performances than for notable new productions.

In connection with one threatened withdrawal it is good news that "Below the Surface" has been reprieved and transferred to the Apollo. This typically British submarine drama, written by men who know their job, well acted and capably produced deserves a second lease of life.

Among the new musical productions two are still happily flourishing. "Derby Day" at the Lyric, Hammersmith, is a slice of English life which Sir Nigel Playfair has set, on his tiny stage, with such mechanical skill and imaginative suggestion as to produce an effect of space and numbers that could scarcely be bettered at Drury Lane, an effect that is cleverly enhanced by the tuneful, pertinent music of Mr. Alfred Reynolds, and enriched and vitalised by the unflagging humour, the shrewd, kindly observation of the author, Mr. A. P. Herbert. The acting too is spirited and gay, and the romantic passages full of pleasant emotion and youthful fervour.

At the Palace "The Cat and the Fiddle," cosmopolitan in background and in cast—which includes Miss Alice Delysia, Mr. Francis Lederer (of "Autumn Crocus" fame), Mr. Henri Leoni, and Miss Peggy Wood (of "Bitter Sweet")—once more reveals Mr. C. B. Cochran as the master-wizard of musical-comedy production in a delightful entertainment not the least fascinating feature of which is the quaint original music of Mr. Jerome Kern. This composer can do with melody what Pirandello does with words,

illustrating the moods of characters and annotating the text with tunes and harmonies that are the counterparts in sound of the beautiful, picturesque staging.

Only one new farce has seen the light—"Dirty Work" at the Aldwych—which, though written by Mr. Ben Travers to the pattern that has made this theatre almost a byword in the matter of success, is not quite as happy as some of its predecessors in sustaining the sky-high note of farcical absurdity. The piece lacks, too, the accelerating ubiquity of Mr. Tom Walls. But Mr. Ralph Lynn is as irresistibly funny as ever in this dexterous tale of crooks brought to justice by a shop-walker, and Miss Constance Carpenter, a newcomer to the famous team, is a most satisfactory foil to the laughter-making, familiar personalities of Mr. J. Robertson Hare and Miss Mary Brough.

In the realm of comedy Miss Marie Tempest infuses into the cock-and-bull story of "So Far and No Father" at the Ambassadors all her perennial gaiety, her inimitable genius for making subterfuge appear straightforward, prevarication but another aspect of truth. It is a typical Marie Tempest part that Mr. H. M. Harwood has built up with his accustomed spontaneous wit, his almost uncanny flair for fitting the right word into the right place—a display of verbal pyrotechnics that never pretends to be anything more than a *jeu d'esprit* designed to disarm criticism by making us laugh—and succeeding.

With "Tobias and the Angel" at the Westminster—a play that can claim affinity in conception and treatment with M. Obey's "Noe" as performed by the *Compagnie du*



## PLAYS OF THE MONTH

*Quixote*—Mr. James Bridie has delved comedy from the Apocrypha. In this facetious transcription of the Tobit legend only one scene rises from the ridiculous to the sublime, that in which the Archangel persuades the bored little wife of Tobias of the error of her ways. That the first night audience gave the play an enthusiastic reception was mainly due to its unimpeachable casting and the superb performance of Mr. Henry Ainley whose translation from the intellectual wickedness of "The Anatomist" to his new angelic guise goes to prove that he is our foremost character-actor and orator.

No survey of the past weeks would be complete without reference to the death and

resurrection—all too short—of Mr. Maurice Browne's production of "Punchinello," an enterprise made remarkable by the loveliness of its design and settings and the acting of Mr. George Hayes and Miss Laura Cowie.

Nor must I forget Mr. Clifford Bar's "Rose without a Thorn" still blooming under the auspices of the People's National Theatre at the Duchess, in which the author once more demonstrates his skill in turning historical incidents to dramatic account and interprets the love-story of Henry VIII and Katharine Howard in terms of verbal and pictorial beauty that, with the fine acting of an excellent company make the play a masterpiece of its kind.

## THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF A ROMANTIC REVIVAL IN DRAMA

By Malcolm Muggeridge

WHEN I looked through the general outline of what I had prepared to say to-night\* I came to the conclusion that it was exceedingly unliterary. I mean that although my subject is the romantic revival in drama, I am afraid that I have treated it in a general rather than a literary manner. I cannot help that. I don't believe that literature, as such, unrelated to life, is of any tremendous importance or interest, except to specialists.

If I may begin on my subject, I am going to put forward the thesis that a romantic revival in drama at the present time is impossible. The word "romantic" is, unfortunately, indefinable. Yet, as a matter of fact, most people mean about the same thing by it. They mean what is unusual, strange, remote from every-day life. The Victorian age was romantic; if you were a poet you went away to Italy, that is if you were a prosperous poet. But there is another kind of romance, based on poverty. (You will find illiterate peasants dreaming of heaven and hell.) But in both cases, the romantic attitude of mind, (and this is my main point), is based on the desire to escape.

When I say that to-day a romantic revival in drama is impossible, I mean that for the artist, escape is no longer possible. He must be *in* things, or he ceases to be an artist. The train to the South of France is, from his point of view, the train to annihilation. Civilisation, fighting for its life, cannot afford the luxury of romantic art, and it may, as in Russia, find it necessary to have a purely propagandist art. We have not yet reached that stage—at least, most people think we have not, although I sometimes think we have; but that is a personal view.

Modern art, and particularly modern drama, must relate directly to problems which arise out of civilisation's decay. When I saw "Quality Street" it shocked me, and I felt that people ought not to be allowed to see it because its effect on the undeceived would make them forget their duty to recreate a society which was falling to pieces. This is the fundamental fact of to-day: drama, if it is to matter, must deal with the contemporary chaos. Otherwise, it is irrelevant, futile. It must aim at reducing the chaos to some sort of order. The contemporary scene is a civilisation that has become too complex to be manageable. Its standards are obviously and ruinously inadequate—a Civilisation without

\*This article is extracted from the Lecture given by Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge at the Drama League Club-room on Tuesday, February 23rd.

## THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF A ROMANTIC REVIVAL

a religion, in which everyone, from the most educated to the most illiterate, is consciously or unconsciously unhappy—a civilisation from which there lacks any sense of purpose, and which may, therefore, soon cease to be a civilisation at all. Romantic drama has no bearing on such a scene. It cannot wash away the folly of the past.

I was tempted to deal rather with the *undesirability* than with the *impossibility* of a revival in romantic drama to-day, for, in a sense, contemporary drama is mostly inferior precisely because it *is* romantic, and a revival is not only possible, but a fact. The meanest ages, as well as the most robust, tend to be romantic.

On the surface, at least, we live in romantic times to-day. We have, for instance, a romantic Prime Minister, whose main appeal to the public lies in his humble origin. We have a romantic press, and a romantic drama on the stage and on the screen. It is, perhaps, not too fanciful to take the sweepstake as typical of all this. The sweepstake has been the most successful effort in the way of entertainment which has taken place in this country within the last few years. Tales of sudden good fortune have been received by the public with fervour—an El Dorado reached without even the strain and hazard of a journey. If such an attitude in a play may be called romantic drama, then to talk of the impossibility of a romantic revival in drama would be manifestly absurd. Actually, of course, it is no such thing. It is an entertainment, rather than a drama.

In the genuinely romantic periods in the history of the world you get a romantic art that is, perhaps, the most sublime achievement of which human beings have so far shown themselves to be capable. Men of genius may then rightly concentrate all their attention on the ultimate facts of human existence. They are free enough, and by the nature of their environment can go beneath the difficulties and problems of human life and consider abstractly the mystery of things, as though they were God's spies. Their drama is of life and death; of the immense passions which consume men; of love, hate, and the irony of success. This I regard as impossible at the present day, for this is not the mood of the time. We cannot take the fabric of society for granted except by deceiving ourselves. To try to write romantic drama to-day is like lovers trying

to keep love alive by kissing each other into sensuality. A few people, by singing hymns very loudly, can convince themselves that they are a considerable congregation and members of a flourishing church, but their piety will be shallow, and their religion without significance. Romantic drama to-day is impossible.

What is the alternative? A drama that begins with the outward chaos and works into the spiritual realities, instead of a drama that may take an outward order for granted and concentrate all its efforts on the comedies and tragedies of heaven. If we treat of love we have to begin with lovers—lovers strewn about a common in the evening, or leaning together in a cinema; and we wonder whether love can exist at all. We have to begin with marriage—a social order in which no-one any longer believes—and ask ourselves whether, in such society, a man and woman can live together without mutilating themselves. We have to begin at the beginning, and the beginning is the life of the people in the world to-day. We have to be brave, and absolutely sincere. We must be pioneers.

The moment one begins to talk about drama one must talk about Bernard Shaw. His work is like intermittent pills that are washed down with water three times daily. From the point of view of my subject to-night, the effect of his work has been to convince most people that drama can only concern itself with the state of society by ceasing to be dramatic. Bernard Shaw has ventilated the marriage problem without bringing in marriage, but there is no escape to-day, and there is no standing apart and looking at things. You have, if you are to produce drama, to be *in* things and look out from their chaos. You have to be *in* the chaos before you can describe it. We must have a drama that comes from *within*.

All the tradition of modern art tends to make us merely spectators. A spectator may guide an intelligent woman to socialism, but can he hope to catch up to an intelligent description of the age? It seems to me that the failure of contemporary drama has, to a great extent, been due to the fact that it has been made largely by spectators, for spectators. Spectators may look on benevolently, in which case they give us birth-control and the League of Nations, but they cannot manage the world's affairs because they have no real part in the world's affairs. They are pompously superior

## THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF A ROMANTIC REVIVAL

or aggressive, but quite unable to manage the crew or steer the ship. If they are put in charge of the ship they wreck it; not because they want to, but because they cannot help it. Even a King had more contact with the community to which he belonged than we have to-day.

Drama of to-day must be from within. Not a commentary, but an expression of life in the form it takes to-day. Wheels turning; the slow, clean movement of metal; the shaft of light through cinema darkness; the getting of money, lust for money, fear of money. The whole life of our time, however hideous, is the only reality.

To a writer, the temptation to escape, to be romantic, is particularly great. You get paid a little money for something, and you see the possibility of escape, of living a velvet life by a row of books, and being quiet. Most modern writing is by people who live, or would like to live, such lives, or else it is done just for money. The latter is best, because wanting a lot of money does associate you, at least in one respect, with your fellows.

Perhaps if you are brought up to be a spectator you are a spectator for ever, and can never hope to get the warm affection of writing from within, about what is.

I sometimes think we are on the threshold of a wholly new life; a life that arises out of the few activities of a mass of people. Hitherto, art has been a kind of mystery, a way of using surplus wealth. It has been a specialised thing. It has always been for the few, paid for by the few, appreciated by the few, and written about the few in books that were read by the few. Our fathers believed that by providing education for the many, making them all become Bachelors of Art, art in its own specialised form would be produced and appreciated by the many. This process has not worked out as our fathers expected. The "Daily Mail" has flourished, and continues to flourish, and art has died. The process appears to have killed art, and I am inclined to think that when it is restored it will no longer be associated with spare wealth and spare energy.

I sometimes imagine, in Manchester, that the whole place will one day come alive, will find expression, perhaps in forms not hitherto known. I sometimes imagine that the decay of life will fertilise new life, and that the people will create for themselves a way to live—

that they will all find a more useful occupation. In some such society the drama from within might get written, and it is some such society that a living contemporary drama might help to make possible.

After what I feel has been a somewhat rambling survey, let us consider two points.

Firstly, that a revival of romantic drama is impossible to-day because the social conditions and stability necessary for its production are not available, and that the romantic mood may only be substituted by self-deceit, and can only create a sham drama.

Secondly, that the kind of drama that is possible and necessary to-day is a drama from within, based on what is, and that this is not forthcoming because those who might be expected to produce it are rather spectators than participants.

In any case, drama, like every form of art, is bound up in a way that it has never been before with the whole problem of how society is to be organised, and drama must, therefore, concern itself with that problem, even to the extent of being directly propagandist. I think this is a much smaller danger than escaping by being romantic.

If you ask me where the kind of drama is that I have tried to describe, I can only answer that I do not know. But that it is necessary, I am certain. A scene of its re-birth, and a fruit of its re-birth, will be what I have somewhat pompously described as "the drama from *within*, about what *is*"!

### NEWTON ABBOT REPERTORY COMPANY.

The Newton Abbot Repertory Company has for the past year specialised in the trying out of new plays, the latest and one of its most successful productions being, "The Doom Window," a comedy in three acts by W. P. Lipscombe.

The play had a particularly strong local interest as it was a dramatization of the novel of the same name by the late Maurice Drake of Exeter, whose family has for many years been entrusted with the care of the stained glass in Exeter Cathedral and whose novel is founded on the author's intimate knowledge of his craft. The plot is woven around the adventures of a young glass painter, John Kirby, of "Kirby and Son" who has a contract for restoring a famous window representing the Day of Judgment, from which the title of "The Doom Window" is derived. An American millionaire, Chesney Wayne, whose passion is the collection of beautiful old glass, brings pressure upon John to use a secret process, which he alone knows, to make an exact imitation of the window and sell him the original. The chief interest of the play lies in the struggle between John's fiancée and a charming American girl, the one to abet and the other to frustrate the millionaire's designs.



ation.  
within  
ociety  
help

ewhat  
oints.  
ma is  
itions  
on are  
mood  
and can

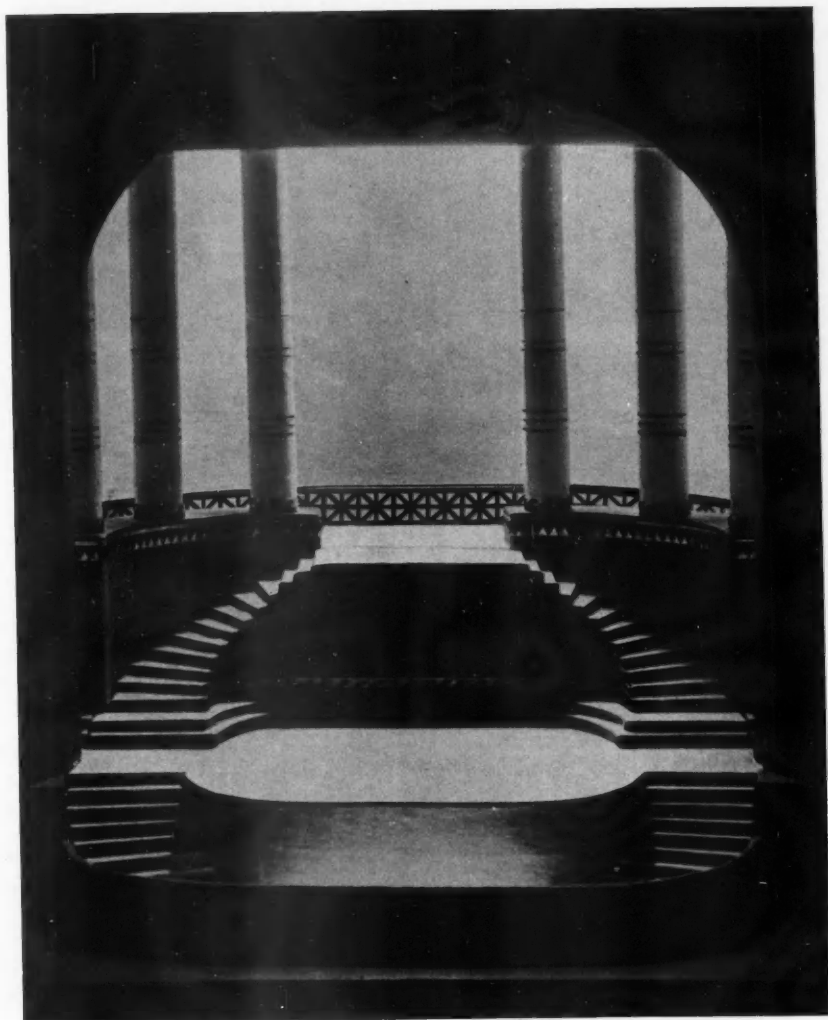
that is  
from  
is not  
ht be  
tators

of art,  
been  
how  
must,  
blem,  
ropo-  
maller

ntic.  
ama is  
answer  
essary,  
and a  
some-  
a from

PANY.  
has for  
w plays,  
ductions  
ree act

erest as  
name by  
nily has  
of the  
novel is  
of his  
tures of  
nd Son"  
window  
which the  
d. An  
passion  
pressure  
ne alone  
low and  
the play  
charm-  
other to



THE PALACE OF THESEUS.  
PRODUCTION BY WALTER  
SINCLAIR. UNIVERSITY  
CIVIC THEATRE, DENVER,  
U.S.A.



SCENE FROM "LA MAUVAISE CONDUITE"  
BY JEAN VARIOT. AS RECENTLY PRO-  
DUCED AT THE NEW THEATRE, LONDON,  
BY LA COMPAGNIE DES QUINZE.

# SOME PRACTICAL NOTES ON PLAY PRODUCTION

By A. K. Boyd

THESE notes are inspired by a conviction that the amateur movement in drama which, by its encouragement of the manager who dares to aim high, has done, and is doing so much for the professional stage, is not ready enough to learn from the professionals what they have to teach. In many amateur societies the standard of technical efficiency is deplorably low. In their endeavour to capture the imaginative heart of drama they are inclined to neglect the mundane task of "getting it across." All too often they lack entirely that "finish" without which there is no dramatic illusion. The resulting limitation of amateur achievement can justly be laid to the charge of one man,—the producer. Many amateur producers, filled with high artistic aspirations, have little knowledge of the technique of production, without which their highest conceptions will never kindle an emotional spark in the heart of an audience. Some do not even know that this technique exists. Others treat it with contempt, as a collection of outworn theatrical devices which have no place in the higher art of the theatre. But they are wrong. There can be no living art without technique.

Without question the art of production can best be learnt by the amateur at a producer's course, on a real stage, with real actors and a real play. But the written word can convey certain rudiments, and it is in the hope of reaching a wider circle of producers than will ever go on producers' courses that these notes are written.

The following headings cover some of the most important matters in which indifferent amateur productions fall glaringly below the professional standard in technical finish.

1. PUT THE AUDIENCE FIRST. The producer must have the audience on his side, or kill the play. He can alienate them by inaudibility, invisibility, bad grouping, or excessive delay. He can bore them with monotony, and befuddle them with obscurity. He can mislead them by not emphasising what is significant, or by emphasising what is

insignificant. One or two of the above points may be elaborated. Sensitive and beautiful lighting may entirely miss its effect if it fails in the prime function of stage lighting,—to illuminate the players. No actor born can hold his audience long if he be invisible. The most impressive stage setting can do little to undo the harm caused by a long delay in its preparation. So ignorant is the average audience of the art of production that if it be irritated, bored or otherwise mistreated as above, it will blame not the producer, but the author of the play or the actors. Yet it is the producer's head which should be offered to them in recompense. He has committed the unpardonable sin of neglecting his audience. There are even some producers so ignorant as to blame the audience for the failure of a play. He must be a very inept chooser of plays who does so with justice.

2. STAGE SILENCE IS GOLDEN. It is a truism to say that many amateurs are slow on their cues. This is a deadly fault, but there is a more important reason than that generally cited,—that it makes a play drag. It deprives the producer of one of the chief weapons in his equipment. By countless reiterated silences (generally only a fraction of a second in length) it destroys his power to *make silence speak*. A silence of even half a second should be pregnant with meaning: it should hint more forcibly than words a doubt, a hesitation, a change of mood, a change of purpose, or many other things. When it is only one of a hundred meaningless silences scattered throughout the dialogue it can hint nothing at all. Silence, when it comes must be tense with significance. When there is nothing to signify there must be no measurable period of silence between speech and speech. (It might be mentioned here that many professionals make such a fetish of "biting on their cues" that in moments of excitement they bite off each other's words and make the dialogue unintelligible). A common abuse of silence is seen on the entrance of an actor in the course of dialogue between

## SOME PRACTICAL NOTES ON PLAY PRODUCTION

others already on the stage. Unless there is such significance in the entry that it demands a silence, there should be no measurable interval between the new arrival's *first speech* and the speech preceeding.

But if many producers allow the dialogue to loiter aimlessly, they are equally reluctant to allow those longer pauses, filled by movement, action, or palpable thought, without which many situations cannot convey their full significance. They know nothing of the throbbing stillness which may follow an emotional crescendo. About such silences there can be no rule. The producer without experience can only learn by trial and error at rehearsal. If in the course of his experiments he succeeds in making the silence speak, and it does not convey its message redhot to his brain, he should cease producing. Such men lack the sensibility without which plays cannot be produced.

3. RELATE MOVEMENT TO SPEECH, CHARACTER OR MOOD. It is painfully evident in some productions that many of the movements have not been dictated by the producer at all, but are mere aimless driftings inspired by the inclination of the actors. There are only three kinds of movement permissible on the stage—(1) utility movements, to bring the players into the required spatial relationships, or to secure the desired grouping (2) movements indicative of character or mood, or related to speech (3) movements necessitated by dramatic action. In a skillful production the layman should detect no movements of the first kind at all; they should all appear to come under one or other of the two last headings. Movements should be definite unless they are intended to show aimlessness, indecision, or some such mood. Whenever possible relate movement to speech. (Try the following on a stage: A and B are conversing close together, and A is to move away from B in irritation. If A moves away, turns and then speaks, it is a false movement. If A moves away and turns *as he speaks*, the movement becomes vital and significant. Or take another case: A and B are several yards apart, and A is to speak. Try his speech in three different ways,—(1) with A stationary, (2) A advancing to B and speaking as he moves, (3) A moving to B, stopping, and then speaking. In any given case one of these methods will be right, the other two

wrong.) A play which has dialogue so dull that shifting of places must be introduced for mere variety is better left unacted.

There is no need to insist on the demerits of such rudimentary errors as shifting on the feet, and other tiresome forms of restlessness; but it is often not appreciated that there is a positive virtue in absolute stillness. Few amateurs know this. But very slight observation of competent professional acting should convince that a player speaking with no movement whatever of body, head or limbs has called upon some strange reserve of force or intensity which may not be inherent in his words.

4. LET THERE BE LIGHT AND SHADE. The amateur producer is gravely handicapped in that his actors have not been trained to speak, and, even if he were competent, he has no time to teach them. But he can in the course of rehearsal deal with the common vices of monotony and slurring of points, and introduce some semblance of "light and shade." Dialogue may be intellectually dull, but it need never be audibly monotonous; and much dialogue appears dull only because the players are smothering its significance. To keep dialogue alive the producer must secure variety of inflexion, tone, emphasis and pace, and make each speaker *think* his words, and not recite them. Oral illustration is the only effective way of showing what this means, but the producer who is on the look out for technical secrets may hear the oral illustration in any professional theatre. His best course of all is to study carefully some part in a play, and then to hear that part rendered by a master craftsman such as Cedric Hardwicke. He will find that no consecutive sentences are spoken with the same vocal inflexion; that the voice, for example, is raised at the beginning of one sentence, and at the end of another; that a single sentence is rarely spoken throughout with unchanged speed and emphasis. He will note that the beginning of a new sentence is, when desired, made to seem the beginning of a new thought, and not merely the second part of a preconceived speech. He will, perhaps, detect how this illusion is achieved: sometimes by a finality of inflexion at the end of one sentence, followed by a pause and relaxing of position, followed by the new thought flashed hot from the mind, with the whole body

## SOME PRACTICAL NOTES ON PLAY PRODUCTION

braced in a new impulse of utterance: or again it may be achieved by the new thought in its urgency nearly biting off the slower phrases of the last cadence. Above all he will find that voice, facial expression and gesture are blended in an organic whole to convey vitality in every sentence.

With "light and shade" is interwoven the "Making of points,"—that is, conveying to the audience the full impact of every significant phrase in the development of character or situation. The most obvious way of drawing attention to significance is by contrast. The significant phrase may be said slower than what precedes, or faster, or louder, or softer, with more inflexion or with less inflexion. A significant word may be illumined by a hesitation before it, or a pause after it; by greater emphasis, or by under-emphasis. The player should approach each point with the appropriate weapon ready; he should feel: "Though the whole audience be asleep, the way I say this will wake them up, and its meaning will go home to them."

5. ACTING DOES NOT CEASE WITH SPEECH. It is a common criticism of amateur actors that they only act when they speak. For this the producer alone is to blame. No inexperienced actor appreciates the responsibility which rests upon him when he is silent on the stage. (How often is the producer asked: "What can I do all the time that X is making that long speech?" The answer should be nearly always the same: "Keep utterly still, and listen, and show that every word he says is causing a reaction somewhere inside your brain.") The producer alone can see the whole stage picture, and should be aware that an inattentive listener is a dead weight which no actor should be asked to carry. A listener who cannot listen in *character* is an exposed impostor: while a listener who plays his own game and distracts attention from the speaker should be referred to Hamlet's comments on his kind.

6. ON TEARING A PASSION TO TATTERS. In emotional speech some producers fail by attempting to charge the inflexions of ordinary speech with a heightened intensity which they will not carry. Of that other emotional resource of the trained actor,—the flat toneless utterance from which all inflexion has been purged as by the heat of some inner fire—they know nothing. Producer and audience alike

will often blame the actor for failure in a method which should never have been attempted. There is a limit to the range of emotional emphasis: beyond that, under-emphasis opens a new range which is too often unexplored.

The reiteration of the word "significance" in what precedes is not accidental. It is the touchstone of the producer's art. His whole duty is to interpret to the audience the significance which is latent in the printed play, and too often remains latent on the stage. It is not claimed that more than a small fraction of the points which compose the technique of production is included in these notes. They are moreover rudimentary, and the competent producer will have nothing to learn from them. They deal admittedly with matters of detail, attention to which can in no way redeem errors in imaginative treatment, balance, tempo, or characterisation. But neglect of them will inevitably destroy dramatic effectiveness. Good production, even more than good acting, is a matter of significant detail. It can be asserted with confidence that no body of amateur actors will understand the importance of the apparently niggling trifles which exercise the mind of the good producer: but if they are above the "amateur theatrical" standard of seriousness in their endeavours, and if the producer evidently knows what he wants, they will submit. Neither they nor the audience will appreciate the part played by the producer's insistence on detail in a successful performance. Only the expert critic knows enough of the craft to give the producer the praise,—or more often the blame,—which he deserves.

### NOTTINGHAM PLAYGOERS' CLUB

#### "GABRIEL APOLLO"

Cedric Wallis, a member of the Club and a new playwright has in this short two-acter devised a plot which modernises the Classic story of *Acis and Galatea*. The synthetic man, Apollo, has been created by Saffron Walden with a view to their ultimate marriage. Unfortunately a girl friend arrives and devastates the heart of the automaton who marries her instead of his mistress. Some amusing situations arise through a misunderstanding but in the end all is straightened out and the Creator is satisfied. Philip Jones made a most suitable Apollo, the author took "George Hyde," Margaret Tutin was the Creator "Saffron Walden," Nancy Peck was a satisfying "Jane" while Hilda Armitage was in the Eden Philpotts-like part of the charitable spinster "Lucy Chilvers."

NEVIL TRUMAN.



## BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF  
**THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE**  
INCORPORATING  
THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

President  
LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN

Chairman of the Council:  
VISCOUNT ESHER.

Secretary: GEOFFREY WHITWORTH.

Hon. Treasurer: ALEC REA.

*MSS. for publication in DRAMA will be considered if accompanied by stamps for return if unsuitable. All Enquiries should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary at the Office of the League, 8 Adelphi Terrace, London, W.C.2.*

Telephone: TEMPLE BAR 8507-8.

---

*Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.*

---

WE have pleasure in making the official announcement that Viscount Esher has accepted the unanimous invitation of the Council of the British Drama League to become its Chairman in place of Mr. Harley Granville-Barker whose resignation was reported in our last issue. Viscount Esher presided for the first time at the Council meeting held on Wednesday, March 9th, when he received a cordial welcome as Chairman. He assumes his position at a time when that of the League itself has never stood higher. At the same time many new problems are urgent, but this is in itself, we think, a promise of continued vitality and growth. Viscount Esher has already been prominent in literary and artistic circles owing to his connection with that excellent literary magazine "Life and Letters," of which he was for some time editor. We know the League is fortunate in having at the head of its executive body one who, while impartial to any particular department of League activity, has shown so general and notable an interest in the artistic ideals for which the League stands.

Sir Donald Maclean, Minister for Education, has already consented to attend the final performance in the National Festival of Community Drama which has been fixed for the afternoon of Monday, May 9th, at a West End theatre in London, the name of which will be duly announced. The May Number of "Drama" will be a special Festival Number and will include the particulars of all the entering teams together with short reports from each of the Area Committees. We regret that it has been impossible to include in "Drama" during the past months any notices of individual Festivals, but it will be realised that if such an attempt were made the magazine would consist of Festival reports and nothing else! For this reason we have to confine such reports to the annual Festival Number, though we hope in future to allot rather more space than heretofore to general articles and news dealing with Festival matters.

The most important event of the coming month will, of course, be the Opening by the Prince of Wales of the new Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon on the afternoon of Saturday, April 23rd. An inspection of the theatre has already assured us that this will be by a long way the most important and interesting playhouse in the country. As an adequately endowed theatre it will hold a unique place in our stage, and we hope the support given to the New Shakespear Company which will perform in the theatre during the summer will be worthy of the fine setting which English and American generosity has made possible.

We are glad to see that artistic objects figure in the scope of the suggestion which has been brought before Parliament for the legalisation of lotteries. Without presuming to comment on the propriety of the Sweepstake as a matter of principle, it is obvious that the National Theatre and other comparable movements, would achieve a new chance of fruition if the holding of lotteries or sweepstakes for their benefit became permissible. Supporters of the present scheme rightly instance the precedent of the British Museum which in its early stages benefitted largely from a public lottery.

# RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by Norman Marshall

"Mourning Becomes Electra." By Eugene O'Neill. Cape. 7s. 6d.

"These Things Shall Be." By Leonard J. Hines and Frank King. French. 2s. 6d.

"Dawn Was Theirs." By Peggy Barland and Nigel Morland. Barbier. 3s. 6d.

"Letitia Meets the Family." By Roas Hills. Walpole Press. 2s. 6d.

"Rizzio's Boots." By Hal D. Stewart. "Henry." By Ronald Gow. "The Little House." By Susan Buchan. "The Ruler of the House." By John Wood.

"The Resurrection of Joseph." By F. Sladen-Smith. Gowans and Gray. 1s. each.

THE chief characteristic of Mr. Eugene O'Neill as a dramatist is his unerring sense of the theatre. It is a quality which has both made and marred much of his work. Repeatedly in his plays he has set out to grapple with a big theme, and then, failing to get to grips with his subject, has fallen back on mere theatrical trickery to cover up the superficiality of his work and give it an appearance of vitality and importance which it does not really possess. In his latest play his sense of the theatre has tempted him into trying to use the tremendously theatrical story of the Oresteian trilogy to make a modern psychological drama. The result, as was inevitable, is that in being translated into modern times the story becomes transformed as well as translated. The transformation is from tragedy into melodrama.

Admittedly it is good melodrama. In the theatre it would probably grip the attention of the audience for the whole of the five hours which the trilogy takes to perform. All the theatrical possibilities of the theme have been utilised to the full. The play is packed with "strong" scenes, handled with perfect theatrical craftsmanship, and giving plenty of opportunities for strong, vigorous acting. But judged by any other than the standards of pure melodrama, this seems to me a comparatively tawdry piece of work.

In all true tragedy there is, somewhere, a sense of dignity, of magnificence, however superficially humble or even sordid are the people and events in the story. In "Mourning Becomes Electra" Mr. O'Neill has completely deprived the original story and its characters of these qualities. The figures in the Oresteian trilogy are essentially impersonal. Each of them is a personification of a single passion. In a modern version of the story it is inevitable that the chief figures must be humanised so that instead of being personifications of emotions, they become ordinary people obsessed by these emotions. The Mannon family in this play are too abnormal to be interesting. They are made to appear neurotic and hysterical, mean and stupid, cases for the pathologist rather than the dramatist. Mr. O'Neill has made some attempt to reproduce the idea of a group of people fore-doomed by fate, but he has merely succeeded in suggesting a family afflicted by an hereditary streak of insanity. Twice before—in "Lazarus Laughed" and "Marco Millions"—Mr. O'Neill has taken great themes and then succumbed to their purely theatrical possibilities. In these two plays his magnificent use of the visual possibilities of the theatre has to some extent compen-

sated for the way the true issue has been shirked, and has given the plays a certain splendour and beauty, but in "Mourning Becomes Electra" there is no scope for elaborate theatre craft so that the play stands nakedly revealed as a crude story, powerfully and excitingly handled, given a spurious air of impressiveness by numerous clever tricks of stagecraft, but unredeemed by any quality which raises the play for a single moment above the level of melodrama.

"These Things Shall Be" is another example of a big theme used to produce comparatively trivial results. The play opens on the eve of another war, and for a few pages it seems as if this is to be a piece of work of some significance. But it soon develops into a somewhat commonplace story of the adventures of a young airman. Nevertheless, the play has freshness and originality. Judged by what has been achieved rather than by what ought to have been achieved with such a theme, the play is good entertainment, with a superficial air of profundity sufficient to give the audience that flattering belief that they are enjoying "a serious play."

"Dawn Was Theirs" is an up-to-date version of the old "call of the sea" type of drama. Now, of course, it is "the call of the air." This is another play with the merit of freshness and originality, but a little more polish in the writing would have made the characters and incidents seem less melodramatic. Both "The Call of the Sea" and "Dawn Was Theirs" are interesting as examples of plays written by the authors for their own amateur dramatic societies, in the same way as Mr. Sheriff wrote "Journey's End" for his local amateurs. Neither of these two plays is likely to find its way to the West End, but I recommend them to amateur societies, as both are fairly easy to act because of their strong stories and definite characterisation. They lack the highly polished finish which the West End requires, but that is a quality which few amateurs can reproduce in their productions, so that its absence in the writing should not prevent amateur societies from presenting these two fresh and workmanlike plays. Much the same applies to "Letitia Meets the Family." This is a light comedy worth consideration by those amateur societies who so often unsuccessfully attempt to reproduce the highly polished emptiness of the type of West End comedy which is only made tolerable by players with that charm and personality for which managers are prepared to pay so highly. "Letitia Meets the Family" is a drawing-room comedy which does not rely too much on the acting, so it should prove useful to amateur companies whose audiences insist on being given seemingly sophisticated comedy—especially as there are no less than six titled members of the aristocracy in the cast of ten.

The latest additions to the "Repertory Plays" series are all admirable one-acters. "Rizzio's Boots" is a capital example of the fashionable "history in modern speech" type of play. Except for one lapse when Darnley addresses Rizzio as "you little gigolo," it avoids the cheapness and absurdities into which the method can so easily decline, and makes Rizzio, Mary, Darnley and Knox seem very much more real

## RECENT BOOKS

than in any other play so far written about them. "Henry" is that very rare type of play, a really good "thriller" written for boys. In "The Little House," a play for three women, Mrs. Buchan successfully avoids false sentimentality in her handling of a story which could easily have become irritatingly sentimental, but which in her hands achieves real dignity. "Ruler of the House" is a lively and amusing tale of the endeavours of a mother and father to cope with their irrepressible young son. Sentimentality and farce

are the pitfalls of this story, but the author has steered clear of both, so that the play has both charm and reality. "The Resurrection of Joseph" is not, as one might expect, another of Mr. Sladen-Smith's excursions into Biblical history, but the portrait of a present day family. It is doubtful whether Mr. Sladen-Smith ought to be congratulated or reproached for compressing into one act a theme containing enough material for a full length play.

# RADIO DRAMA AND ITS CRITICS

By Cyril Wood

RADIO Drama is less than ten years old. It is, therefore, much too early to dogmatise on its place and value in Dramatic literature. This new dramatic form is still very much in experimental stage, and no one responsible, either for its authorship or for its production, feels with any certainty that we have yet discovered a technique which may be regarded as permanent. But what has already been clearly established is the fact that Radio Drama cannot be dismissed simply as a form of theatrical presentation shorn of visual expression. It must be regarded and judged as a separate Art form. Mr. Norman Marshall's recent reference in "Drama" to the "ordeal of listening to a play on the wireless" draws attention to vital differences between Radio and Stage Drama, including, too, the different effect produced upon their respective audiences. I readily admit that Radio Drama makes a greater demand upon its audience. It demands from the listener absolute concentration in one direction only—that of hearing. It cannot offer any assistance to the bored and easily distracted—that is to the typical audience—in tit-bits of colour, of pleasing decor, of agreeable spectacle or "amusing business." Neither can the poor author be helped out by the pretty actress or by the pretty-pretty producer. He must rely upon his own resources as a dramatist for telling his story, revealing his characters and tracing their development, with the aid only of well chosen words and appropriate sounds. In short Radio Drama is incapable of providing the usual property carrots for the front of the house donkey; and one is not surprised at the plaintive brays of protest which arise on

all sides. One is a little surprised, however, to identify Mr. Marshall's voice as leader of the chorus. As a Producer of the most exacting standards he has often, I know, been exasperated almost to the point of murder by just that lazy-mindedness of the average audience, which now he voices so sympathetically. Stage productions of any pretensions to originality, or sincerity, have been referred to as "ordeals" for just the same reason—that the audience expects to buy entertainment with considerably less personal effort than is demanded when selecting, say, its chocolates or cigarettes. How many Stage productions would survive, much less win popular favour, if they could be obtained for ten shillings a year, and the option of ringing down the curtain if the individual listener were dissatisfied? It is only because many people feel obliged "to have their money's worth" at the theatre that they sit through intelligent plays, thereby developing unconsciously a higher standard of taste in spite of themselves. To overcome this unwillingness of his audience to make any contribution of intelligence or imagination, the vendor of Stage plays calls to his aid all the resources of Stage designer, lighting expert and costumier—every brand of theatrical jam to make more palatable the purgative powder of drama.

It is unlikely that audiences deafened by the roar of the theatrical Niagara will readily welcome the disciplined quiet of the Radio Play. But I suggest to Mr. Marshall (because I know he believes in drama as sincerely as I do myself) that this discipline is actively bringing us back to the first essentials of

## RADIO DRAMA AND ITS CRITICS

drama, the spoken word and human emotion.

Mr. Marshall's remarks suggest that he has never actually "sat through" a complete Radio Play. That is a pity, if for no other reason, because it makes Mr. Marshall ill qualified to pronounce judgment. May I suggest to him that the first experience is usually the worst? Any new Art form—in Music, Painting, or Sculpture—is likely to be something of an "ordeal"; but any intelligent effort made to apprehend it is usually more than rewarded. I would recommend Mr. Marshall to defer further judgment until he has come through the ordeal of listening to, say, 3 diverse examples of the Radio Play. I suggest:—

- (1) A specially written microphone play of the "Squirrel's Cage" type.
- (2) A Shakespearean Play, and
- (3) An adaption for Radio such as the recently successful "Jane Eyre."

Radio Drama has, in fact, re-discovered the drama of the spoken word. When Mr. Marshall says that to him "A Play is as much a matter of action as of words" is he not ignoring the fact that the greatest plays "read" as well as they "act"? In saying this I do not, for a moment, suggest that reading should take the place of the Stage performance—each method serves an individual and separate purpose. But I do suggest that the concentration enforced upon the spoken word earns for Radio Drama a worthy place side by side with Stage Drama.

When Mr. Marshall says he finds listening to a Radio Play almost "as tedious as having to listen to somebody reading a story aloud," is he not forgetting the fundamental principle that a story is meant to be *told*, and not read? Printing is merely a convenient substitute for the real vehicle—the human voice. It may be that Mr. Marshall has had to listen to a tedious story read well: or to a good story told tediously. There is a third possibility, but the implications of that are inconceivable, I am sure, in Mr. Marshall's case!

When he talks of "the little the actors add to the effectiveness of the Radio Play by means of the voice," he is in fact making the criticism that the actors are too often blandly ignorant of the capacities of the human voice to express the dramatist's meaning, and sometimes of the fact that the dramatist has a

meaning to express. As a fellow producer Mr. Marshall would be interested (though, I think, not surprised) to hear at Radio rehearsals the vocal limitations of the average actor. In the theatre the human voice has fallen into disuse. Actors have been allowed (compelled often) to rely upon personal appearance and production—aids to compensate for, or to cover up, an indifferent or useless vocal organ. Radio Drama, by its severe discipline upon author and actor alike, is therefore developing actors whose voices must be good in quality and sensitive to the finest degree in expression.

Mr. Marshall says that to him "acting is ever more a matter of gesture, movement and facial expression, than *mere* vocal inflections." (The italics are mine). In Radio Drama there can be no question of vocal inflections being "*mere*"—they are of vital importance. That they are ever allowed to be "*mere*" in Stage presentation is not a matter for congratulation even though the dramatist's meaning is supplemented, or even supplied, by "movement and facial expression." Probably that meaning never would be conveyed except by such aids, for Mr. Marshall must often have despaired at the inability of actors to bring imagination, or even simple intelligence, to the speaking of their lines.

In Radio Plays words can be no more "*mere*" than vocal inflections. The Radio dramatist is rapidly discovering that not one word of a Radio Play can be irrelevant, "*merely*" decorative, or "*merely*" smart. Dialogue has to be cut down to the barest minimum so that each phrase "*registers*" and does its vital part in forwarding the action, or creating emotional tension. It might almost be said that a good test of the dramatic quality of a play is afforded by the question "Would it broadcast?" Not that I want only broadcast plays—I want the additional insight gained by viewing the dramatists' writing through this new and searching medium.

There is also one other point which is worth noting. The listener to the Radio Play has no other aid but his own imagination. How often in the theatre has one been annoyed, irritated, or distracted by the foibles of the actor, scenic artist, or lighting expert! I do not suggest that in Radio Drama we are wholly *independent* of production irrelevancies, but considered as an ally of the theatre, it is

## RADIO DRAMA AND ITS CRITICS

clear that Radio Drama allows an independent valuation of a play whose real merit is often obscured by the theatrical trappings.

Radio Drama is less than ten years old, but it has already made a contribution to Drama which I am sure its critics would welcome if they made an effort to gain more first-hand experience.

---

### ARE ACTORS MEN?

By John Radcliff

THE difference between an actor and an ordinary man is that the ordinary man has a fixed character and the actor has not. The character of an ordinary man can be described. We can say he has a strong character, or a weak character, or a good character, or a bad character. We can predict roughly what he would do if attacked by a burglar or asked for a loan. One man would submit to a burglar, another would put up a struggle; one man would agree to a loan willingly, another would be evasive. Sometimes our guess is wrong, but more often it is right.

About an actor, however, we cannot make such predictions, because he has not a fixed character. If he had a fixed character he would leave a distinct, individual stamp upon everything he did. When he acted "Hamlet" he would display his own individual characteristics rather than the characteristics of Hamlet. Such an actor would be a failure; his audience would expect a rendering of Hamlet and would get nothing but a rendering of a stage nonentity.

The theatre demands a man without characteristics peculiar to himself, yet a man possessing the characteristic of abnormal imitativeness peculiar to "The Profession" as a whole. An actor must sink himself in his part; when playing Hamlet he must identify himself with Hamlet, must imitate the way Hamlet would act and feel and think—must see the world through the eyes of Hamlet, and of Hamlet only.

This abnormal imitativeness is one reason why actors make disappointing husbands. A woman studies an actor's character and when she thinks she understands him and can foresee what sort of a husband he will make, she

marries him. Then a year later she finds that the man she thought would be a husband of the "attentive" type has become a husband of the "work before wife" type. She misjudged his character because she failed to realise that an actor can never be himself. Even when off the stage he is always acting a part. If he kept to one part he could be understood as easily as other men. But he does not keep to one part; his imitative genius makes him suggestible to every passing influence. One day he is as ineffective as Micawber, another day he is as dynamic as Napoleon. It is impossible to predict what he will be or what he will do. The ordinary man is more stable. The ordinary man behaves in very much the same way this year as he did last year. A woman can foresee more or less accurately what sort of a husband an ordinary man will be, but her expectations of how an actor will turn out are nearly always falsified.

The actor's imitativeness has its disadvantageous side, however. It is his imitativeness which keeps him mentally young. The ordinary man becomes more and more set in his ways and opinions as he grows older, but the actor keeps fresh and elastic and in step with the changing world.

---

### COMING EVENTS

#### NATIONAL FESTIVAL OF COMMUNITY DRAMA

April 8th and 9th—Scottish Area Final at the Athenaeum Theatre, Glasgow.

April 9th—Northern Area Final at the David Lewis Theatre Liverpool.

April 13th—Eastern Area Final at King George's Hall, Tottenham Court Road, London.

May 6th—Final Festival in London.

#### LONDON EASTER SCHOOL.

April 1st—10th at the Ballet Club, W.11.

#### CLUB ROOM, 8 Adelphi Terrace.

April 5th—Debate on "The Rose without a Thorn," in the Club Room, 5.30 p.m.

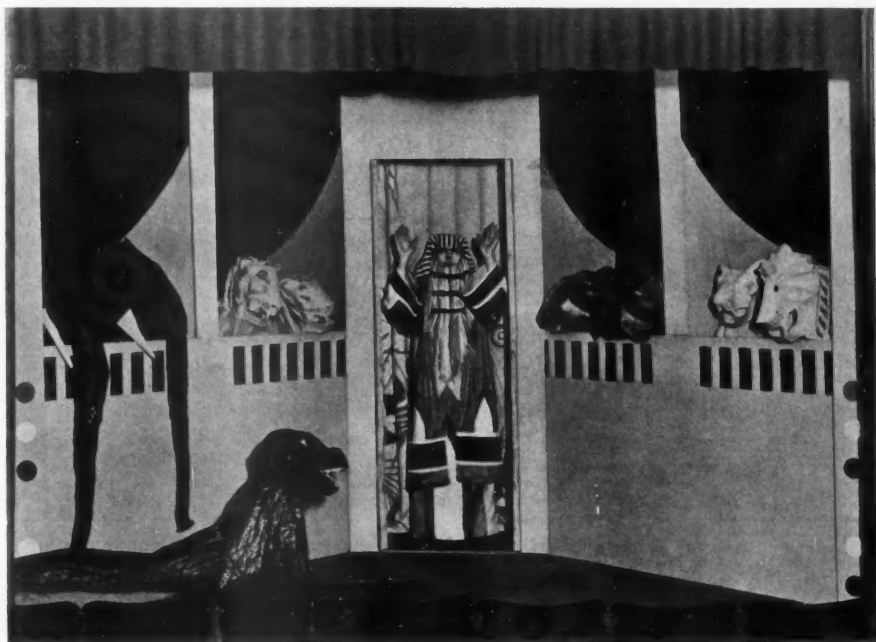
April 26th—Lecture by Mr. Tyrone Guthrie on "Modern Tendencies in Stage Production," in the Library at 8.30 p.m.

---

### NOMINATIONS TO COUNCIL

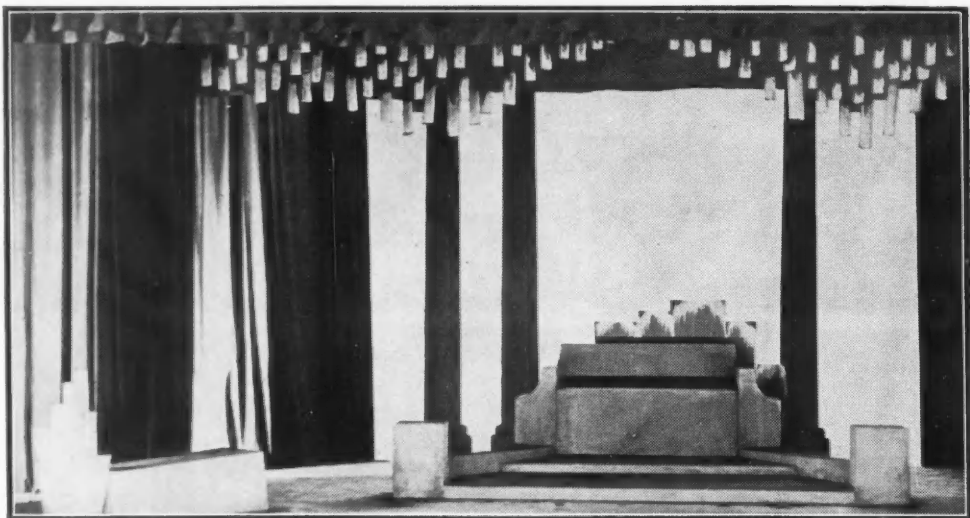
Members of the League are reminded of the nomination papers circulated with this number. All members and affiliated Societies out of London will, it is hoped, exercise their privilege.





Photograph by courtesy  
of *The Manchester Guardian*.

A NOAH'S ARK PLAY: "MRS. NOAH  
GIVES THE SIGN" BY F. SLADEN-  
SMITH. THE UNNAMED SOCIETY,  
MANCHESTER.



SCENE FROM "THE BRIGHT ISLAND" BY  
ARNOLD BENNETT, AS PRODUCED BY  
THE CURTAIN THEATRE, ROCHDALE.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## FESTIVAL OR COMPETITION?

DEAR SIR,

Mr. Middleditch, in his article "Festival or Competition," obviously meant to be provocative: but, whilst agreeing with his main purpose (expressed in the objects of the Drama League), and applauding such admirable statements as:—"Amateur actors generally speaking, are only on the threshold of aesthetic appreciation and responsibility and will not for a long time realise that the onus of . . . the staged drama . . . may rest entirely with them," I can not help feeling that, in spite of its skillful casuistry, his position is based on fallacy.

I admit that in the past a certain amount of hot air has been let loose about the Festival Spirit—a crime to which I plead guilty without a trace of contrition. "Competition is necessary, human frailty and the rest of it. The Festival is all very well for an Utopia of angels, but sheer sentimentality for ordinary hard-boiled mortals doing the daily round": I admit it. What is the alternative? The Competitive Spirit? Heaven forbid!

It is easy to make fun of such expressions as "joyful celebration," although why a festival should not be a "joyful celebration" and at the same time a pleasant everyday affair too, I can not imagine: they frequently are. To dismiss the Greek attitude as merely competitive, is to tear it from its spiritual roots.

Let me say, frankly, that if competition comes first, the National Festival of Community Drama, is one of the most unjust and fraudulent movements in the country. As a competition, there is practically nothing fair about it. To begin with the winners are chosen because they have scored more marks than their opponents: now these marks, with the best will in the world on the part of the adjudicator are inaccurate symbols. How, for instance, are you to tell precisely (in terms of accurate marking), where production begins and acting leaves off? Secondly, how is it possible to find a common standard (again for accurate marking) with productions so different as Schnitzler's "The Farewell Supper" and Mr. Dawe's "A Bulgarian Wedding": one had a cast of four experienced amateurs and the other about thirty novices: one is the mature work of an accepted dramatist, the other the first attempt of a newcomer. In the third place, how is one to balance (accurate marks are still required) the work of a society attached to an East End parish against that of one supported by the resources of a high commercial enterprise? How does your competition stand now?

Finally, all that is despicable about the Festival, all that makes one question the place of the theatre in a civilized community, springs from pandering to the competitive spirit. Snobbery (frequently of a poisonous inverted sort), mean attempts to get fellow teams disqualified, petty abuse of the adjudicator: these are the breath of life to the pot-hunter. And when it comes to societies trying to find out the name of next year's judge, before choosing a festival play, I fail to see that art comes into the question at all.

Perhaps, if Mr. Middleditch were to recall a certain spontaneous performance by St. Matthew's Old Boys' Dramatic Society, he might find once more that there

was a good deal in the Festival Spirit (sentimental though it may be) after all, and that it certainly need not imply a horrid scene of earnest choric dancers raising flushed faces to the dramatic dawn!

Yours, etc.,

ROBERT NEWTON.

## SCENE PAINTING AT THE SLADE SCHOOL OF FINE ART

DEAR SIR,

May I bring to your notice the fact that a class in Scene Painting has been in existence at the Slade School for several years, under the direction of Mr. Vladimir Polunin (late of Diaghileff's Russian Ballet, the Beecham Opera Company, etc.)? During that period Mr. Polunin has trained several gifted scene-painters who are quite capable, under his supervision, of undertaking any orders for stage scenery.

Besides its artistic qualities, the method employed by Mr. Polunin has many technical and economical advantages; for instance, owing to the use of thin, soft priming, the scenery need not be rolled on tumblers, but can be folded like a handkerchief and packed in boxes, thus considerably lessening the cost of transit and storage.

Prices of such scenery do not exceed those charges by other scenic workshops.

We should greatly appreciate any opportunities given to young and talented artists who are helping to establish an English School of Scene Painting on new lines.

Yours truly,

RANDOLF SCHWABE,  
(Professor).

University of London,  
University College,  
Gower Street, London W.C.1.

## PRESS CRITICISM.

SIR,

As a Provincial Press Reporter I should like to suggest to your correspondent, Mr. B. J. Benson, that he is well off the rails about press criticism of Dramatic shows.

If the criticism of an amateur performance is genuine and true, it matters not whether the critic is a so-called authority or merely a provincial reporter.

If the criticism is "tripe" the amateur actor will readily recognise the fact. That is; if he or she has any gumption, whether the "tripe" has been the work of a provincial or a so-called fully-qualified specialist. Drama is a living force. Heaven save us from making it the toy of Dramatic "Authorities."

Let me remind Mr. Benson once more that the value of criticism depends on the criticism itself not upon the status of the critic. The housewife in her spare time can often produce a better work of art than the so-called specialist. This can be proved at any W.R.I. exhibition of Crafts. I am not a poultry farmer, but I can be trusted to distinguish between a good egg and a bad one.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mr. Benson's proposals would destroy spontaneity in dramatic art and convert all amateur actors into a valueless collection of soulless marionettes.

Yours &c.,

KENNETH STEWART,

1, West End Terrace,  
Fort William.

### THE PLAYS OF JEAN-JACQUES BERNARD

DEAR SIR,

As the circulation of unauthorised American translations of two of Jean-Jacques Bernard's plays has caused some slight inconvenience to the author and myself, and waste of time and some expense to the secretaries of amateur societies, may I say that all enquiries in regard to the performing rights of Bernard's plays in England should be addressed to me, c/o Messrs. James B. Pinker & Son, 9, Arundel Street, W.C.2.

Yours faithfully,

J. LESLIE FRITH.

40, New Cavendish Street, W.

## SHEFFIELD PLAYGOERS' SOCIETY

A 21 YEARS' RECORD.

THE Sheffield Playgoers' Society was founded in March, 1910 "to promote and encourage interest in the Drama . . . and especially to discuss matters concerning the Drama and kindred arts." Thus runs the statement of the objects of the Society in the first body of Rules.

There were no productions by the Society, no play readings, no creative activities at all in the minds of the founders. Their aim was to give the people of Sheffield the opportunity of judging for themselves what the new movement in Drama meant, and the first method which suggested itself to this earnest and instructable pre-war generation was to organise lectures. There was an insatiable appetite for lectures, in the first decade of this century. Not merely were people willing to listen to them, but most distinguished men and women were even willing to give them—without money and without price, in order to convert the heathen to a better way of thinking. In the first season seven lectures were given to the Society, among the lecturers being Mr. Gilbert Chesterton, Miss Cicely Hamilton, Mr. William Poel, and Mr. Holbrook Jackson. In the second season (1911-1912) Mr. John Galsworthy, Mr. Hilaire Belloc, Mr. Granville-Barker and Miss A. E. Horniman were among those whose voices were heard by the Playgoers, in return for their half-crown subscription.

This was not all. The Society invited professional companies to come to Sheffield and give plays at the Temperance Hall (now the Sheffield Repertory Theatre) under the auspices of the Society, which guaranteed the sale of tickets up to a certain amount. The early ventures of this kind were eagerly received. The Irish Players, with Sara Allgood, Maire O'Neill,

Arthur Sinclair and William Fay gave "The Playboy of the Western World," "The Shadow of the Glen," and other examples of their famous art; the Bessie Comedy Company, including Mr. Orlando Barnett, gave "Pillars of Society"; and Mr. Iden Payne twice brought a company, including Mr. Esme Percy, and gave "Man and Superman" and Massfield's "Nan," etc.

Then the Society, enlarging its scope, organised and financed a Repertory Season for the whole month of February, 1913. But for a complex of reasons, the box office returns did not nearly meet the expenses. The Society, too hopefully, had made itself entirely responsible for all outgoings, and had to appeal to its guarantors for no less than £249 to meet the loss on the month's working.

This was a heavy blow. The membership of the Society before the Repertory season was 515; the next season shows a drop to little more than half that number. However, the Sheffield Repertory Company continued to exist under that title, and toured the country for some years.

"Let us now praise famous men" and our pious founders. The first President was Mr. T. Walter Hall. Miss Gladys Davidson and Professor Moore-Smith were active members of the first Committee. The first joint Secretaries were Mr. J. H. Dowd and Mr. J. F. Horrabin. Among the active members of the Society from the beginning, though not yet on the Committee in its earliest days, were Miss Radford, Miss Hawson, Mr. Crossland and Mr. Jackson. Miss Radford was Assistant Secretary from May, 1913. Thus these pillars have supported the structure from its foundation, and are, we rejoice to say, still upholding the fabric.

By the time the Society met to arrange its next Autumn season Europe was at War. Activities were at once reduced, but not suspended. Play-readings, which had been introduced experimentally in December 1913, were found to be the most practicable means of keeping members in touch with contemporary drama.

On October 1st, 1919, the Society came to life again, and a meeting was held, the first since May, 1918. At this meeting Mr. Crossland proposed that the Society should be wound up! An amendment in a contrary sense was however carried, and a new committee was constituted with Miss Radford as Secretary. The Society began the season with fifty members, and ended it with two hundred and eight. The crisis was over.

A spate of activities began at once, and is still, after twelve years, in full flood. The first post-war year was distinguished by visits from Mr. William Archer and Mr. John Drinkwater, who read his play "Cromwell," at that time unpublished.

A Dramatic Section was formed, and Miss Hawson produced "The Dear Departed" (Houghton) and "The Price of Coal," (Brighouse). A full list of the play-readings included "Abraham Lincoln" (Drinkwater), "Alceste" (Euripides), and "The Clouds" (Aristophanes).

Next season (1920-1921) the first big production entirely carried out by the Society was "Foundations," by Galsworthy, under the direction of Miss Hawson.

1921-1922 was Miss Hawson's production of "Pygmalion" and Miss Radford's of "The Mollusc." The Autumn Conference of the Drama League was held this year in Sheffield under the auspices of the

## THE SHEFFIELD PLAYGOERS' SOCIETY

Society, and the first Inter-Society visit took place when the Leeds Art Club amused us with "Renovating Eve" (Keightly).

The Society for the first time took the Theatre Royal, and presented "The Circle" (Somerset Maugham) to a very large public. Miss Hawson undertook the production.

In 1923-1924 the large theatre was again taken, and filled, by the Society with their production of "The Admirable Crichton" (Barrie), again under Miss Hawson's direction. This year also the first production in English of Martinez Sierra's "Cradle Song" was given by Mrs. Storr Best.

The greatest event of 1924-1925 was the production of the whole cycle of "Back to Methuselah" by G. B. Shaw. It was freely prophesied that this tremendous undertaking would break the Society, but, on the contrary, the result was not only glory, but a good deal of money.

In 1925-1926 the special feature of the productions was that Mr. Lennox Robinson came personally to rehearse his play "The Round Table." Professor Morgan gave a notable series of lectures on tragedy.

The Society by now had settled down to a steady

out-turn of five or six productions, a dozen play-readings, and various lectures and special features by distinguished visitors every season. Ends were made to meet, if not to overlap.

In 1928-1929 the Drama League Conference was held for the second time in Sheffield at the invitation of the Playgoers' Society. Among this year's productions was a play "Caught," which had been sent in for the Society's play-competition by the author, Anthony Armstrong, and had won the first place. This play afterwards ran for six weeks at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre, and was then produced in London.

In 1930-1931 the varied and interesting series of plays included no "first productions," but this current year (1931-1932) another original Revue will be added to the charge of Mr. Moorwood and his co-adjutors.

Thus our record of twenty-one years' activity comes to a close. Surely it is a record which may be looked back upon with pride. But all of us, members of the Sheffield Playgoers' Society, and friends of their work, hope and believe that the next twenty-one years will show that the fruits of experience and maturity are finer and richer than the blossoms of youth. The best is yet to be.

## NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

### AUSTRALIAN REPERTORY

Mr. S. Talbot Smith, president of the Adelaide Repertory Theatre writes: "My board has asked me to supply a deficiency appearing in a recent number of Drama. Mr. Pennington's interesting article on the now defunct Turret, in Sydney, states rather rashly: 'The Australian Repertory Movement began in Melbourne 1910 . . . Apart from the Melbourne Repertory, the most promising and ambitious of all these was the Turret . . . It is probable that each venture has meant a loss to its founders or shareholders.'"

It seems odd that he should never have heard of the pioneer in Australia, the Adelaide Repertory Theatre. We started in 1908, and have steadily marched forward. We have always been strictly amateur, and—with a struggle in Wartime—have always paid our way, having now funds invested, a comfortable club and rehearsal room, and a stage in a new hall on whose builders we were able to make requisitions to suit our purpose.

The policy has always been to show Adelaide the plays which it would not be likely to see in its commercial theatres, where the box-office necessarily controls the situation. We have given most of the modern dramatists, whether British, European, or Australian. We give five plays a year (three performances of each), and have also five lectures or club evenings, at which a short talk on some aspect of Drama is sandwiched between one-act plays that give new playing-members their chance. In the more important shows, a light play is usually selected to follow a "heavy" one. In this year of depression, it has been thought well to lean to the cheerful side, and the programme sketched out derives from Quintero, Monckton Hoffe, Galsworthy, Lonsdale and Barrie.

A note on finance may be interesting to other similar bodies. The subscribers, about 700, get for

their yearly guinea ten evenings as above shown. They are allowed a week's priority in booking seats, after which the general public can book. Giving each play three times (Saturday, Wednesday, Saturday), we further take in cash from £70 to £90, or within about £30 of the actual cost. The ideal of course would be 1,000 members, leaving no room for cash-takings at all, and this seems likely to be reached in time.

The standard of acting has always been high; the professional stage has claimed several of our players, and has unsuccessfully made offers to several others. A devoted dozen or so, mostly themselves players of repute, manage the affairs of the theatre, subject to election at the annual meeting of subscribers.

### "MY LADY'S DRESS"

BEC LITERARY INSTITUTE D. S.

"Think of the sickening expenditure of human energy that goes to the making of My Lady's Dress." Taking this sentence as his theme, Edward Knoblock has written a stimulating play, a quaint mixture of laughter and tears.

A few weeks ago, the Bec Literary Institute D.S. presented this play to a large audience with marked success. It is impossible to mention any of the 34 players, as the whole cast acted together with a team spirit which was admirable. Many of the players were apt to emphasise the wrong word at times, but it was plain that everyone concerned was enjoying giving the piece, and this enthusiasm quickly spread into the auditorium.

The scenery was an outstanding feature. Realising that space was limited, the stage managers confined themselves to a plain simplicity. The peasant's house in Italy, for instance, was merely neutral coloured curtains, with a view through a window, but the coloured costumes of the actors showed up against them remarkable well.

H. K. S.



## NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

### BOURNEMOUTH LITTLE THEATRE CLUB.

(SEASON: SEPTEMBER, 1931—MAY, 1932.)

THE Club began its season in September with the production by Mr. George Stone of John Galsworthy's comedy "A Family Man," which was notable for some very convincing character acting and for the lively treatment of the police-court scene. This was followed in October by Ashley Dukes' poetic comedy of manners "The Man with a Load of Mischief." The play was sympathetically produced and acted, and had the advantage of a really beautiful stage-setting. In November the Club presented "Thunder in the Air" by Robins Millar. This interesting play, which has for its theme the visitation of the ghost of a young soldier killed in the war, was extremely well produced, the psychic atmosphere being very cleverly handled. For December a play of popular appeal was selected. This was Ben Travers' hilarious farce "Rookery Nook," in which the acting certainly proves the Club's versatility. In January, "Hobson's Choice," that clever comedy of Harold Brighouse, was presented. The Lancashire dialect of the various characters was well sustained, and the amusing costumes of 1880 gave the play an added appeal. A double bill was given in February consisting of John Drinkwater's two-act play "Mary Stuart" and F. Sladen Smith's one-act Gothic farce "The Invisible Duke." The serious drama of the former and the stylised humours of the latter were both well realised, the two plays forming an effective contrast. Both plays were embellished with specially designed costumes and scenery, and Mary's room at Holyrood and the Astrologer's laboratory were two excellent stage-pictures. In March the Club presents "Seven Keys to Baldpate," described by its author, George M. Cohan, as a "mysterious and melodramatic farce." St. John Ervine's light comedy "Mary, Mary Quite Contrary" has been chosen for April, and the season concludes in May with the production of G. B. Shaw's intellectual farce "Misalliance." It will be realised from this summary that the Bournemouth Little Theatre Club's activities are not confined to any one type of play, and that its acting members take in their stride modern comedy and drama, costume comedy and drama, farce and burlesque. Each play is given for six performances, three of which are limited to Club members (The B.L.T.C. has nearly a thousand non-acting members), and three are open to the general public. In each case the response has been highly satisfactory.

### THE WIGMORE PLAYERS CONWAY HALL, LONDON.

(1) "The Last Hour," by George Graveley.

In this little play about Francois Villon, we were shown that sorry rogue, who had the soul of a poet, in relation to three women, his mother, his betrothed, and a tavern wench. He was loved by them all, in their differing ways, but leaves them to escape the attentions of authority, and to seek fresh adventure.

James Mettam was as fine a ruffian as one could wish to see, and Viola Powell gave a sensitive study as the dying mother, though she was at times a little difficult to hear.

(2) "Love at Hazard" from the French of Marivaux. This seldom-acted seventeenth century play is of very slight in texture—an old plot decked with some novel fancies. An excellent free translation preserved the spirit of the piece, which the players still further enhanced by a good feeling for the period and a well maintained illusion of spontaneity. The play had been carefully produced, with some characteristic touches, by Edgar J. Saxon, who himself undertook the difficult part of Deverill, the master disguised as the man, with great skill. His sense of repose on the stage is always a pleasure, and though perhaps he brought too great an air of melancholy to this character, it was a delightful performance. Max Coton was excellent as the grotesque valet, revelling in the enjoyment of temporary authority.

The enjoyment of the whole evening was doubled by the contemporary music played between the acts by a small orchestra. This had been specially arranged by Mr. R. Temple Savage, and was a great delight.

### HOLYWELL PLAYERS

It was certainly adventurous of the Holywell Players to attempt, at the Ballet Theatre Club, "The Race with the Shadow" (Von Scholtz), since this play has to rely so much on argument and is therefore inclined to become static in performance. But with Mr. Michael Macowan as producer the play took on a competency that riveted one's interest and the attempt became an achievement. To obviate monotony the producer had placed his characters on two different levels by means of a rostrum—a risky experiment when there are so few people to handle. While the subterfuge succeeded in emphasizing the planes of thought, it detracted from the flow of the play and, as the players creaked up and down the steps, occasionally gave it an air of artificiality. This is essentially a play of ideas, strong enough to come through without so obvious a stage trick.

The acting was vital and beyond all petty criticism. Each character bore a sincerity that lifted the play out of the realm of wordiness and made one pray never to see it with lesser talent. The Professor dominated the man about whom he had written with subconscious truth; the Professor's wife reflected emotionally the conflict of an unusual triangle. The ending was a little diffuse, but there one must blame the author. As an entity it was a powerful piece of work greatly helped by imaginative lighting, a stage-setting of character, and a desire to serve the playwright to the last degree.

### THE DUCHESS THEATRE

Miss Nancy Price's venture at the Duchess Theatre includes monthly Sunday afternoon Debates, and the last Debate was opened by Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth who spoke on the National Theatre. He pointed out that Miss Price had achieved one of the most important items in a National Theatre: a sense of ownership on the part of the audience in the theatre which they attended habitually as part of their ordinary life. This was a great asset to any theatre, and he felt Miss Price was doing a valuable piece of propaganda for the National Theatre of the Future.

vaux.  
s of  
some  
erved  
rther  
well  
been  
ches,  
ficult  
with  
ways  
at an  
htful  
esque  
ority.  
bled  
s by  
nged  
nt.

ayers  
with  
rely  
d to  
chael  
ency  
e an  
lucer  
s by  
there  
fuge  
t, it  
ayers  
ve it  
deas,  
ous a

cism.  
out  
er to  
d the  
ious  
the  
as a  
thor.  
eatly  
g of  
o the

eatre  
the  
orth  
out  
por-  
mer-  
hich  
life.  
Miss  
for



---

# THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

INCORPORATING THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

*President :*

LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN.

*Vice-Presidents :*

THE EARL OF CRAWFORD AND BALCARRES

VISCOUNT BURNHAM

THE RIGHT HON. J. R. CLYNES, P.C.

SIR MICHAEL SADLER, K.C.S.I.

MISS LENA ASHWELL, O.B.E.

PROF. B. J. DENT

GORDON BOTTOMLEY, LL.D.

SIR J. MARTIN HARVEY

SIR BARRY V. JACKSON

ALBERT RUTHERSTON

*Hon. Treasurer :*

ALEC L. REA

*Chairman of the Council :*

HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER

*Secretary :*

GEOFFREY WHITWORTH

*Council :*

KENNETH R. BARNES

B. J. BENSON, LL.B.

F. S. BOAS, LL.D.

MISS D. M. CARRITT

LEWIS CASSON

L. BOUGHTON CHATWIN

MRS. NESFIELD COOKSON

MISS EDITH CRAIG

D. HAYDN DAVIES

J. FISHER WHITE

MISS ELSIE FOGERTY

JOHN HAMPDEN

MISS MARY KELLY

HOLFORD KNIGHT, K.C., M.P.

THE HON. MRS. ALFRED

LYTTELTON, D.B.E.

THE EARL OF LYTTON

WALTER PAYNE

L. DU GARDE PEACH, Ph.D.

MISS CONSTANCE RADFORD

C. HAROLD RIDGE

R. DOUGLAS ROBERTSON

MISS JANET SCRUTTON, M.A.

GEORGE O. SHARMAN

W. J. TURNER

MRS. PENELOPE WHEELER

MRS. GORDON WHITMORE

*Library Committee :*

F. S. BOAS, LL.D., *Chairman.*

JOHN DRINKWATER

ASHLEY DUKES

PROFESSOR ALLARDYCE NICOLL

SIR NIGEL PLAYFAIR

H. F. RUBINSTEIN

ALBERT RUTHERSTON

ALEC L. REA

C. J. SISSON, D.Litt.

NORMAN WILKINSON

THE aim of the British Drama League is to assist the development of the Art of the Theatre and to promote a right relation between Drama and the Life of the Community.

MEMBERSHIP of the League is open to all persons who are concerned with the practice or enjoyment of the Art of the Theatre, and may be acquired by the payment of an annual subscription of £1 is.

Any organised society or group of not less than ten persons may become affiliated to the Drama League, and as an affiliated body shall acquire and exercise all the privileges afforded by the League, including free receipt of "Drama" monthly and the use of the League's Library. The minimum affiliation fee is £1 is.

*Further particulars from the Hon. Secretary,*

8 ADELPHI TERRACE, LONDON, W.C.2

*Telephone : Temple Bar 8507-8*

---

Please mention "DRAMA" when replying to advertisements

# **Chas. H. FOX Limited**

**THEATRICAL AND HISTORICAL COSTUMIERS**

**ACRE HOUSE, 72, LONG ACRE, LONDON, W.C.2**

Telephone : Temple Bar 6521—6522.

Telegrams : Theatricals, Rand, London.

**COSTUMES, WIGS AND CURTAINS**

**ON HIRE FOR ALL**

**Dramatic and Operatic Productions,  
Pageants, Tattoos, etc.**

**BEWARE** of hiring second-hand costumes which have not been chemically cleaned. This is a matter which is more important to the individual than anything else.

**DO NOT DEAL** with firms who will not give you this guarantee.

**WRITE FOR ESTIMATES.**

## **THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE POSTAL COURSE *in the* ELEMENTS OF PLAY-WRITING**

*A Student who has recently completed the Course writes :*

**"I enjoyed the Course and benefitted a great deal from it.  
It is excellent and I should never hesitate to recommend it."**

The Complete Course consists of 12 Lessons with exercises and Critical Advice. Special attention to individual requirements.

The Fee is £7 7 0 to Members of the League.

### **A SHORT COURSE**

is also available, consisting of the same material as that included in the Complete Course, but with fewer exercises.

**Fee Four Guineas to Members of the League.**

**PROSPECTUS FREE ON APPLICATION TO**

**8, ADELPHI TERRACE, LONDON, W.C.2.**



d

don.

is a